

VZCZCXRO0093
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #0668/01 1001807
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 101807Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9116
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0222
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0220
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 6534
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000668

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN ELECTIONS: CHAIRMAN IWU STILL BOBBING AND WEAVING

REF: A. A) ABUJA 667

[B. B\) ABUJA 632](#)

[C. C\) ABUJA 631](#)

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

[11](#). (C) In a April 6 meeting with local Chiefs of Mission (COMs), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman Maurice Iwu at first insisted that all international observers of the forthcoming Nigerian elections would need to attend an orientation conference in Abuja the week of April [19](#). After numerous COMs protested that this was unworkable, Iwu gradually backed down, first saying that "eminent persons" such as former Secretary Albright would be treated differently, then saying that INEC would find a way to resolve such "logistical issues," perhaps by letting such late-arriving observers be cleared via some sort of official note. He later added that resident diplomats were in a different category and considered to be "vouched for," and would be accommodated an unspecified simpler procedure. Iwu did not give a clear response to questions from EU COMs about how their large observer mission, some of whose members are already in country, would be accredited, nor about how our election partners NDI and IRI would be handled. He was firm, however, that some domestic NGOs (including some which have received USAID funding) would not be permitted to observe the elections because of their earlier criticisms of INEC's performance.

[12](#). (C) Asked about other aspects of election preparation, Iwu said most ballot papers had already been printed, and that, were pending court cases to require changes (which he clearly does not expect), he had contingency plans to accommodate this. He identified Adamawa, Kano and Plateau states, and parts of the Niger Delta as areas where he was most concerned about attempts to manipulate the results, and Lagos, Anambra and Ondo states where he was particularly worried about violence during the elections. He urged COMs to continue advocating the rule of law, and insisting that voting day not be delayed. He argued that "the worst election is better than no election." (Comment: Our concern remains that this may be about as positive as anyone can be about this process.

End comment.) End summary.

Observer Accreditation

13. (C) The Ambassador began the April 6 meeting by asking Iwu to clarify how he planned to accredit international observers of the April 14 state and April 21 national elections. Iwu said INEC had made a "policy decision" that all such observers would need to attend an INEC "orientation conference" which would explain the "context" of the elections, and would be held in Abuja during the following week (Note: this was the first any of the COMs had heard of such a conference. End note). Iwu noted that INEC had now received lists of observers from most embassies; visitors who came later would be welcome, but would "not be allowed to observe the elections proper."

14. (C) The Ambassador said this posed a problem, since many of those planning to observe the elections would not be in country until a few days before the April 21 presidential polls. He noted that NDI and IRI's short-term observers would not be in Nigeria before April 16, and former Secretary Albright, the NDI delegation head, would not arrive until the 18th. The UK High Commissioner added that the head of Britain's official delegation, Labour MP (and former Minister of State for Africa) Chris Mullin would also not arrive until just before the elections.

15. (C) Iwu said such "eminent persons" could be treated differently, but insisted that "most" observers would need to be briefed. When pressed further by the Ambassador and other COMs, however, Iwu suggested that the accreditation of such late arriving members of official delegations could be handled by some sort of official note. Still later, he added that those diplomatic missions which had already submitted lists of their own observers would not have a problem. Their missions had "vouched for" them; a simpler process would be

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announced for them the following week. (FYI: The list we provided INEC includes the names of all Mission observers, as well as those of all USG TDY observers of whom we are aware. End FYI.)

16. (C) The head of the EU Presidency office in Abuja noted that the EU's long-term observers were already in the field checking on elections preparations. It was not practical to summon them all back to Abuja to attend this newly-announced orientation, and yet they needed some kind of documentation to do their work without hindrance. He appealed for INEC to come up with a procedure to allow them to be registered in the field. Iwu replied, without elaborating, that his office would try to accommodate such observers, and suggested that their situation was an "unintended consequence" of INEC's need to regulate some groups of domestic observers whom he alleged were seeking to undermine the whole process.

17. (C) The Canadian High Commissioner asked if such domestic observers, particularly those affiliated with the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) umbrella organization, would be able to operate. Iwu replied that some of the NGOs affiliated with the TMG had taken stances which would lead anyone to question their ability to act as observers. He claimed some NGOs were seeking to "undermine the credibility of the system" and bring about a "breakdown in law and order." While some constituent members of the TMG, including some which had been critical of INEC such as the Nigerian Bar Association, would be accredited as observers, others (Note: not further identified) whom he described as suitcase NGOs affiliated with it would not. He added that the Alliance for Credible Elections (ACE - an advocacy group umbrella organization which has received some funding from our Elections Partners) would not be accredited to observe. He noted that ACE had taken out full-page newspaper ads critical of INEC that he said were intended to discredit and disrupt the electoral process, which he claimed raised national

security concerns.

Elections Preparations

18. (C) Ballots: The Ambassador asked how the process of printing ballots was proceeding. Iwu replied that "almost all" the required ballots had been received, and that observers would be able to see samples of the ballots one week before each of the elections, i.e., the state elections ballots would be available on April 7 and the national ballot on April 14 (Comment: as of April 10, the state ballot is still not available. End comment).

19. (C) Court cases: Asked how he would handle a late Supreme Court decision to add one of the candidates INEC had previously barred from contesting, Iwu said that, time permitting, INEC would seek to add the candidate (especially if in a state-level race) with a sticker or stamp. Pressed about what he would do if the Supreme Court ordered him to restore Vice President Atiku to the national ballot, Iwu said INEC would seek to use the ballots already prepared for a runoff contingency, which only listed parties. Iwu added that he remained very confident that the Court would not require INEC to rule in Atiku's favor. It would either turn the VP down outright, or simply declare that there was insufficient time to add him, given the constitutionally mandated necessity to have the presidential elections finished by April 29. Iwu also questioned the qualification of some of those whom the courts had already required INEC to add to the ballot; he speculated that, should they win on election day, these candidates would likely be disqualified later.

110. (C) Hot Spots: Asked which states would be most likely see attempts to manipulate the result either through rigging or intimidation, Iwu said he was particularly concerned about Adamawa, Kano and Plateau states, and parts of the Niger Delta. The Ambassador said he was surprised Iwu did not include Lagos state in his list, where we had heard violence was likely. Iwu replied that violence, but not rigging, was a concern in Lagos, as well as in Anambra and Ondo states.

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111. (C) The UK High Commissioner noted that most COMs had heretofore limited their public comments to calling on all sides to respect the rule of law, and insisting that neither the elections nor the scheduled May 29 transition to the new administration be delayed. Iwu hoped the COMs would stick to this line. He argued that "the worst election is better than no election," and reiterated his commitment to proceed at all costs.

Comment

112. (C) Iwu's efforts to downplay unresolved problems are contradicted by what our own officers, as well as IFES, NDI, IRI, the EU and other trained observers here continue to see for ourselves: a disorganized and shambolic lack of preparation for elections which are only days away, and an INEC more concerned about what outsiders will see than on what will actually happen. End comment.

CAMPBELL